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WAXMAN PROPOSES LEGISLATION TO ASSIST INDIGENT HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS

Felicia Grunfeder, a constituent of mine, has been denied a \$119 monthly Supplementary Security Income benefit because she receives reparation payments from the West German government. When her case came to my attention, I became deeply concerned about the injustice being done to Ms. Grunfeder and to others who may be in the same circumstances. I don't believe Congress intended to deny welfare and health benefits to a poor person who would otherwise be eligible except that she was receiving token payments from West Germany for the terrors she experienced and survived at the hands of the Nazis.

Ms. Grunfeder was, as a five year old child, sent to a concentration camp where she remained until the end of the war. She and others like her were permanently injured or maimed by the Nazis, who perpetrated some of the most revolting crimes ever committed against human beings.

Germany's reparations payments to the victims of these war crimes, however token, are intended to partially compensate Ms. Grunfeder, and others like her, for an incredible loss. In fact, we all know that no compensation program, however generous, can undo the permanent damage done to the victims of Nazi war crimes. Germany's payments, under its Federal Compensation Act of 1956, are merely an effort in that direction.

Congress established the eligibility standards for the Supplemental Security Income program. I do not believe that

in so doing, it intended to equate annuity or pension benefits, rental income, or stock dividends with reparation payments for the war crimes suffered at the hands of the Nazis.

Surely, the West Germans did not intend such payments to be used to provide "subsistence" food and housing to Holocaust victims and thereby relieve the U.S. Treasury of its basic obligations to impoverished Americans.

For this reason, I have introduced H.R. 6291, a bill to amend the Social Security Act to provide that reparations payments received by Holocaust survivors shall not be considered income for purposes of determining an individual's eligibility for Supplemental Security Income benefits or the amount of such benefits. The bill was introduced last month and I am now seeking co-sponsors.

I believe the basic fairness of the bill is compelling. Our government already excludes reparations payments from income for purposes of paying income taxes. I do not believe we should count those payments as income for those who happen to be impoverished and for whom survival is a daily struggle.

Although this legislation will benefit survivors throughout the country, it does not involve much money. It only affects Americans who are otherwise eligible for SSI benefits except for the counting of their reparations payments. People like Ms. Grunfeder who are, because of the Holocaust, doubly disadvantaged should not be penalized by our government. They suffered more than several lifetimes of terror and horror at the hands of the Nazis.